DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 254 CE 079 291

AUTHOR Docking, Russell
TITLE Vocational Education Assessor Training Programs. Review of Research.
INSTITUTION National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Leabrook (Australia).
ISBN ISBN-0-87397-436-0
PUB DATE 1997-00-00
NOTE 29p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 252 Kensington Road, Leabrook, South Australia 5068, Australia. E-mail: ncver@ncver.edu.au; Web site: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/>.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Competency Based Education; *Educational Assessment; Educational Needs; Educational Policy; Educational Research; *Evaluators; Foreign Countries; Interrater Reliability; Literature Reviews; Needs Assessment; *Performance Based Assessment; Postsecondary Education; Research Needs; State of the Art Reviews; *Training Methods; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

Anecdotal and conceptual research on assessor training programs in Australia since 1990 was reviewed to determine research priorities for the next 3 years and to identify the research's implications for policymakers and practitioners concerned with training assessors for three settings: formal training, workplace training, and human resource management. Special attention was paid to the content and value of assessor training and organizations and individuals involved in assessor training. Areas identified as requiring further investigation included the following: range and characteristics of existing assessor training courses; impact of assessor training on assessment behaviors and quality of judgment; impact of assessor training on individuals being assessed in terms of learning, motivation, and feedback; impact of assessor training on enterprise productivity; and validity and reliability of research assessment approaches. Recommendations for policymakers and practitioners included the following: (1) include interpersonal skills in assessor standards; (2) tighten accreditation procedures to ensure that all assessment competencies are covered, that assessor trainers are qualified, and that the assessment process is rigorous and includes on-the-job components; (3) provide for ongoing auditing of assessor training courses; (4) promote specialist units more aggressively; (5) ensure that all assessors (including Technical and Further Education lecturers) are qualified assessors; and (6) establish a national register of assessors. (Contains 42 references.) (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 434 254

NCVER

Assessor training programs

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Hayes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Russell Docking

CE 079 291

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

NCVER

Vocational education assessor training programs

Russell Docking

REVIEW OF RESEARCH
1997

© Australian National Training Authority, 1997

This work has been produced with the assistance of funding provided by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and is published by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Ltd, A.C.N. 007967 311 under licence from ANTA. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process without the written approval of NCVER Ltd. Requests should be made in writing to NCVER Ltd.

ISBN 0 87397 436 0
TD/TNC 51.02

Published by NCVER
252 Kensington Road
Leabrook SA 5068
AUSTRALIA

Contents

Executive summary *1*

Context *3*

What is assessor training? *5*

- kinds of assessor training programs
- target learning outcomes
- assessing and certificating assessor competency
- registering assessors
- maintaining quality in assessor training
- marketing and promoting assessor training programs

Who is involved in assessor training? *14*

- organisations involved in design and delivery of assessor training programs
- selecting assessor trainees

What is the value of assessor training? *16*

- how certificated assessors use their skills
- costs and benefits of assessor training

Implications for policy and practice *18*

Directions for further research *20*

References *22*

Executive summary

THIS STOCKTAKE REPORT reviews research conducted in Australia since 1990 that relates to assessor training programs. The report is designed to assist with the identification of research priorities over the next three years. It identifies what conclusions can be drawn from completed research that will be of use to policy-makers and practitioners, and whether sufficient research has been done or whether gaps exist that deserve further investigation.

The review of research suggests a number of implications for policy makers and practitioners. These include:

- sponsoring further research (see below)
- including interpersonal skills (communication skills, cultural awareness and gender awareness) in assessor standards
- tightening up on accreditation procedures to ensure that all the assessor competencies are covered, that assessor trainers are qualified and experienced, and that the assessment process is rigorous and includes on-the-job components
- providing for on-going auditing of assessor training courses to ensure that they conform to their accreditation conditions
- promoting the specialist units more aggressively
- ensuring that all assessors (including TAFE lecturers) are qualified assessors
- establishing a national register of assessors (or comprehensive industry-based registers)

The review also revealed areas requiring further research investigation. These include:

- the range and characteristics of assessor training courses (accredited and others) currently on offer

- the impact of assessor training on assessment behaviours and quality of judgement
- the impact of assessor training on the person being assessed in terms of learning, motivation and feedback
- the impact of assessor training on the productivity of enterprises
- research assessment approaches such as professional judgement and holistic assessment to measure their validity and reliability, and to identify ways of encouraging integrated competency-based assessment

Context

THERE ARE MANY different contexts for assessment, many different people who may be assessors, and many different assessment procedures.

Competency-based assessment involves the gathering and interpretation of evidence relevant to well defined competency standards, and the establishment of systems to manage the evidence gathering and interpretation process.

Contexts for assessment include formal training (such as TAFE, schools and universities), workplace training (also known as on-the-job training), and human resource management (selection, performance appraisal). Assessors include lecturers, specialist workplace assessors, industry assessors, line managers, supervisors, teams, licensing authorities, and the learners themselves (Rumsey 1993; Jones 1993b; Bloch, Clayton & Favero 1995). Assessment procedures include written examinations, oral assessments, practical tasks or projects, and the observation of workplace performance.

The interest in assessor training has increased since the development of competency-based approaches (Bailey 1993, p. 5), particularly because of the extension of training and assessment responsibilities beyond the traditional training providers. Little or no assessor training was offered to those responsible for traditional measurement-based assessment (Bloch et al.1995). In any event, those who were trained in traditional measurement approaches would still require training to handle competency-based assessment (Millan 1996; Toohey et al. 1995). Martin (1993) includes workplace assessor training as an integral part of the competency-based training (CBT) model. The significance of assessor training is reflected in the work of the National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body and the National Staff Development Committee of ACTRAC. None-the-less, there is still a view that assessor training is unnecessary (Ormond 1992).

Part of the problem arises from the preference in some areas for 'professional judgement' as an alternative to competency-based assessment. Bloch et al. 1995) reflect on the fact that experts may have 'internalised a model of

competence' that may or may not be the same as those of other people. This use of these 'gut feelings' as a basis for assessment, so common in many contexts, raises serious quality assurance concerns. Experience demonstrates that such an approach does not meet the requirements of validity, reliability, fairness and equity, and it is not something that can be trained. Holistic assessment also presents significant problems in terms of these criteria, and is regarded by some as difficult (if not impossible) to teach (Smith 1993).

Van Berkel (1996, p. 8) defines the role of an assessor as 'to reliably determine the competencies or lack of competencies of an individual when assessed against a prescribed benchmark'. In this paper, research that relates to the training of any assessor for any assessment context and for any purpose or procedure is reviewed.

A review of the literature reveals that there are two major forms of published papers in the field of assessor training programs: anecdotal studies and conceptual studies.

Anecdotal studies (sometimes referred to as 'case studies') are typically presented at conferences by practitioners from industry, training providers or representatives of government agencies. These papers provide a very general description of the context of a particular approach to assessor training and the outcomes observed. The writers of these papers are deeply immersed in assessor training and are very context bound, and rarely attempt to demonstrate external validity by reference to other studies or contexts. The papers are generally well received by other practitioners, who draw upon them for practical ideas which they can use in the context of their own workplace.

Conceptual studies (sometimes referred to as 'armchair research') reflect upon experiences or ideas from the position of some philosophical or conceptual standpoint. Papers of this kind are presented at conferences and published in journals by academics, consultants and representatives of research institutes. Working party reports would also tend to belong to this category. The writers of these papers vary in their experience of assessment training and are very concept bound. In addition, they seek to influence the direction of assessor training programs by illustrating the relevance of their theoretical position by drawing upon anecdotal studies and empirical research. The papers are generally well received as a bridge between theory and application, but their actual impact on practice is erratic.

What is assessor training?

LITERATURE IN THIS area reports upon the form and content of assessor training programs, the certification and registration of assessors, quality assurance and marketing.

Kinds of assessor training programs

This section reports on the structure, form and length of assessor training courses and how they have changed since inception.

In general terms, assessor training has followed the national assessor standards in form and content. These standards were first developed by the National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body, established in 1993 as the Assessors and Workplace Trainers Competency Standards Body. Two versions of the assessor standards have been developed, the first was published in 1993, superseded by a revised and much expanded version published in 1995 (Alexander 1997).

The National Staff Development Committee of ACTRAC has developed a suite of resources for assessor training that include an assessor training participant's guide, an assessor training program workbook and assessor training program resources. Assessor training materials have also been developed as part of the Certificate IV in Workplace Training.

Assessor training courses typically run from two to five days (Bloch et al.1995). The hospitality industry conducts a two-day course (Newton 1992) as does the Navy (Reeves & Benton 1997).

While most courses require the completion of some on-the-job practical exercises, some assessor training (and assessment) is conducted entirely off the job (Alexander 1997).

Scant reference is made to the resources used in the courses. Ballenden (1992) describes a manual for assessors and Gibb (1991) describes a learning package 'Assessing competence in the workplace' (NSW TAFE Authority) consisting of

a 13-minute video and print-based training resources that can be used flexibly as a basis for workshops, as a classroom resource or for private study.

Little mention is made of the background or skills required of assessor trainers. Newton (1992, p.4) indicates that the assessor workshops conducted by the Hilton Group are facilitated by an industry assessor tutor, and Reeves and Benton (1997) specify very exhaustive requirements for assessor trainers in the Navy.

The Navy workplace assessor training course is a stand-alone course that runs over two days for personnel of leading rank or above (Reeves & Benton 1997). The course is based on the 1993 assessor standards. Courses are conducted at a central site and in remote locations. Assessor trainers in the Navy were expected to meet a formidable set of requirements, including:

- Certificate in Vocational Instruction
- diploma accreditation in engineering
- Chief Petty Officer rank
- 15 years RAN on-the-job experience
- competencies in RAN training and technical fields
- workplace assessor course
- the RAN Training Co-ordinator Course
- an advanced assessor training program
- the Broadmeadows RPL course
- recent experience in workplace assessment
- competencies in workplace assessment

There is an urgent need for a comprehensive survey of the content, form and delivery modes of assessor training courses and the requirements of assessor trainers. Such a review should also investigate alternative methods of providing assessor training (Bloch et al. 1995). While a national curriculum has been developed, there is no data on the extent to which it is being used. The National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body has recently drafted a set of guidelines for those conducting assessor training, reflecting on content and assessment processes. Research will be needed into the effectiveness of these guidelines when they have been implemented. Without this research, change in assessor training cannot be monitored.

Target learning outcomes

What content is covered by assessor training and what outcomes are expected?

Some writers do not call for any assessor training at all (e.g. Ormond 1992). Bloch, Clayton and Favero (1995) suggest that managers often feel they do not need assessor training because they believe they have enough experience and expertise in the technical area. Docking (1990 and 1992) suggests minimal training is needed if appropriate infrastructure is provided (notably: clearly defined standards, evidence requirements and record-keeping systems).

Casey (1993) suggests that as the roles and responsibilities of assessors may differ (from conducting assessments to monitoring assessments) the training required would also differ. In his report, the assessor training was customised to match the needs of the specific industry in each case study.

The ANTA Ministerial Council has specified that all assessors should be competent against the endorsed competency standards for assessors and in the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being assessed (ANTA 1996; also Toohey et al. 1995).

Jones (1992) lists the responsibilities of assessors to be covered through the 1993 Workplace Assessor Standards. In a later paper Jones (1993a) outlines a curriculum for assessor training covering such matters as purposes of assessment, forms of assessment, the conduct of assessment, and key quality principles of assessment.

Cseti and Nissen (1996) describe the current 1995 assessor competency standards developed by the Competency Standards Body—Assessors and Workplace Trainers. The standards consist of the assessment standard covering the ability to 'conduct assessment in accordance with an established assessment procedure', the extension unit 'plan and review assessment' and four specialist units: 'develop assessment tools', 'design and assessment system', 'establish an assessment system' and 'manage an assessment system'.

These objectives cover the technical skills, but the standards indicate that expertise in the area being assessed, familiarity with the standards, and communication skills are also required. A number of writers suggest that assessor training should go further than the techniques of assessment. For

example, Gibb (1993, p.64) suggests that the real challenge is to get trainers to accept that the active participation of the learner is a crucial element in the new system of training and assessment'. Percival (1992) describes the role of assessor training workshops as 'training of assessors, sensitising the profession to the meaning and uses of competencies, and action research to improve assessment technologies and to improve the nursing competency standards'.

Other writers indicate that assessor training should also emphasise the significance of the language, literacy and numeracy skills of the assessor, but question whether training in these areas could be accommodated within the limited time-frame of an assessor training course (Bloch, Clayton & Favero 1995). Travers (1995) urges assessor training to take special interest in the needs of women re-entering the labour force and to encourage people from different cultures to take part (see also Misko & Saunders 1995), and to be sensitive to discrimination that might be embedded in the competency standards used in assessment.

Providers of assessor training may deliberately (or accidentally) customise the training to reflect specific industry needs. Examples of research that explores the extent of customisation and its impact on quality are reported on pages 11 to 14.

Assessing and certificating assessor competency

Considering the function of assessor training, it is surprising to see how little is said about the assessment of trainee assessors. Reeves and Benton (1997) report that in the Navy's assessor training course each graduate is required to complete three assessments under the guidance of a training co-ordinator. This concern is also reflected in Alexander's (1997) issues for enquiry, listed later in this paper.

Registering assessors

Bloch, Clayton and Favero (1995) call for an investigation of the practicality and advantages of a national registration of assessors. The idea of such a register of assessors is currently being investigated (ANTA 1996). Registers have been established in specific industry areas such as metals and engineering, building and construction and hospitality. The NFITC (1993) registers assessors for specific units of competency for a period of three years

if they demonstrate competence in assessment and in that unit. The NFITC has established a small core of assessors who then assess others to expand the pool. What criteria should be used to admit an assessor to such a register?

Alexander (1997) lists 'competence' in the assessment standard unit and the extension unit of the Competency Standards for Assessment, and 'competence against the relevant vocational competencies' at least to the level being assessed. This view is reflected in a number of industry areas. For example, Bartlett (1997) cites the requirements in the mining industry as a qualification as a workplace assessor earned through a training program accredited against the national assessor standards, and qualifications or experience and a demonstrated level of competence in the field or vocation where they are assessing.

In a similar vein, Brinkworth (1996) reports that the telecommunications industry expects assessors to be 'competent in both the work being undertaken and in the process of assessment'. Assessors are registered if they are 'deemed' to be competent in the area being assessed and if they have successfully completed an accredited training course for the national competency standards for assessors. They are allocated an 'approved telecommunications assessor' number.

In the metals industry, 'assessment must be undertaken by an assessor approved by and registered with the industry ITC' (van Berkel 1996, p.8). The criteria for registration are that an applicant must have completed an accredited course which meets the National Assessor Competency Standards (or equivalent); must be fully conversant with the National Metal and Engineering Competency Standards; and must themselves be technically competent in the areas being assessed or ensure an appropriately competent person is involved in the assessment process (pp. 8–9).

Other writers extend the requirements further to include understanding of the context, training processes and communication skills.

Fripp (1996) lists the requirements of an assessor as: technical expertise in their area, understanding of the employment or education environment, and knowledge of assessment processes and procedures.

Newton (1992) provides a person specification for (registered) workplace assessors at the Hilton Hotel Group. These require completion of the train-the-trainer course and workplace assessor course, and a prescribed set of experience, skills, knowledge and attitudes

Worsnop (1993) suggests that assessors need to be 'familiar with their field, the standards that relate to the occupation or area of study they are assessing and RPL assessment methods and procedures and have reasonably effective communication and questioning skills'. Reeves and Benton (1997) report that in the future in the RAN, interpersonal communication skills will be required in addition to assessor skills.

Other writers also include endorsement by the industrial parties. Rumsey (1994) lists the requirements as: highly skilled in the aspects of competence to be assessed; acknowledged competency in assessment and relevant technical areas; adequate level of literacy in written and spoken English; completed appropriate assessor training; and endorsed by relevant industrial parties. Hancock (1993) specifies the interim registration criteria for the building and construction industry as: technical competence in the skills to be assessed; appropriate literacy in spoken and written English; acceptability to an industry review panel; successful completion of assessor training to national standards; and endorsement by the enterprise consultative committee.

Other industries go beyond basic assessor training. Assessors registered to assess in the Certificate and Diploma in Frontline Management are not only expected to be competent in the competency standards for assessors but also the specialist unit 'design assessment tools'. They are also expected to be 'very flexible in their approach, highly organised and committed to the principles of the FMI' (Dyson 1996).

Maintaining quality in assessor training

In their study of on- and off-the-job assessment, Thomson and Pearce (1993) conclude that 'the training programs in assessment that are currently available to teachers and supervisors need to be evaluated with a view to improving their quality' (p. 35). They call for action to 'raise the assessment skills of both [TAFE] teachers and [workplace] supervisors', (p. 37). Thomson (1994) again expresses concern that no checks have been developed to see if assessor training programs are producing competent assessors. Bloch, Clayton and

Favero (1995) also call for the evaluation of 'current assessor training programs, including follow-up studies to determine the competence of the graduates . . .'

Alexander (1997) lists four criteria for quality assurance: the use of qualified assessors; established validation, feedback, appeals and verification process; industry-endorsed assessment guidelines; and provision for industry audit of the assessment process. The ANTA paper (1996) elaborates these four strategies to maintain quality. In particular, ANTA emphasises the use of validation, feedback, appeals and verification processes (which include third party review, training and mentor support, review of procedures, review of instruments and re-assessment of trainees); and industry audit of the assessment process (including adherence to guidelines, client satisfaction, equity and fairness, validity and reliability, costs and throughput.)

What quality criteria should be applied? Firstly, one can review the assessor standards. Jones (1993b) reports on the validation of the first set of assessor competency standards.

Secondly, one can look at the quality of judgements made by trained assessors. Hummel (1995) conducted a study comparing trained workplace assessors with TAFE assessment. He found a 'parity of judgement between the Industry Assessors and the TAFE Assessor' in an RPL process for a national training module. (Although this rather begs the question 'how do we know that the TAFE assessment is valid?'.)

Thirdly, one can look at the requirements for registration. Van Berkel (1996, p. 8) indicates that 'agreed standards for recognition of assessors' is a key component of a quality assessment system.

Then one can look at the side effects of assessor training. In the metals industry, assessors 'will be subject to a form of moderation . . . which will include periodic reviews, validations of results and investigations of appeals' (van Berkel 1996, p. 9). The NFITC (1993) also audits the quality of assessor performance through a number of indicators including: the number of appeals, re-assessment random sampling, complaints and recertification assessments.

Finally, one can enquire about acceptability by industry. Cseti and Nissen (1996) report that 'relevance to the industry/enterprise' is cited as a major

requirement of good assessor training (p. 3), although this can be taken too far. There is evidence that in an effort to be flexible, relevant and competitive, some assessor trainers are not addressing the full range of skills and knowledge required by the standards (Alexander 1997) This is borne out by the study of Reeves and Benton discussed below. Alexander reports that the National Assessors and Workplace Trainers Body is developing a guide to ensure proper coverage of the standards by trainers.

In the only comprehensive study of the quality of assessor training, Reeves and Benton (1997) have conducted an extensive review of assessor training in the Navy. They found that:

- Twenty-five per cent of graduates felt that their training was insufficient.
- Courses conducted in remote locations were considered less effective, as at times the courses were truncated to meet other organisational demands, or the trainers were not committed to the idea of a competency-based approach.
- Some graduates were not using their training in planning and assessment documentation.
- Although assessment of workplace assessor skill on the job is a critical component of assessor training, as many as 79 per cent of the respondents did not complete the three assessment tasks required for qualification. Reeves and Benton expressed concern that this failure to assess the assessors would undermine the credibility of the course and the CBTA approach itself. Where assessments were done, they were often assessed by training co-ordinators who were not trained assessors themselves.

- There was a lack of information for assessor trainers, so that it was not generally known that the assessment task was required, nor that the assessor standards underpinning the course had changed (from the 1993 to the 1995 version).
- Many of the trainers were not qualified to conduct the courses.
- The RAN course fell short of other industry-based assessor training courses in a number of areas, partly because it was based on the 1993 standards.

Alexander (1997) suggests that assessor training be reviewed, using the following questions:

- Are the assessments of assessors addressing the broad range of skills covered by the assessor standards?
- Are skills and knowledge integrated in the assessment of assessors?
- Is sufficient evidence of competence being gathered?
- Are assessment training providers monitoring and reviewing their assessment procedures?
- Are assessments carried out both on and off the job? How are on-the-job assessments verified?
- Is credit being offered to certificate assessors towards a workplace training certificate?
- Are people with special needs being adequately catered for?
- Have there been appeals and what opportunities have there been for reassessment?

In short, are the assessment training providers practising what they preach?

Marketing and promoting assessor training programs

There is very little written about this topic. Jones (1993b) recommends that 'consideration be given to ways in which the development and delivery of training for assessors may be encouraged and promoted'.

13

Although over 10 000 copies of the assessor standards have been distributed, Cseti and Nissen (1996) report that industry penetration is still low. They also argue that much more needs to be done to promote the four specialist units to provide the context and systems within which trained assessors can operate.

Who is involved in assessor training?

RESEARCH IN THIS area is interested in the trainers and trainees participating in assessor training.

Organisations involved in design and delivery of assessor training programs

Alexander (1997) indicates that there are over 200 providers of assessor training in early 1997. Bloch, Clayton and Favero (1995) list private training providers, individual enterprises, TAFEs and universities. To this list, Bloch (1996) adds assessment centres.

There are many examples of industry-based assessor training courses, such as in the hospitality industry (Newton 1992) and the Navy (Reeves & Benton 1997). The Admin Training Company is developing a customised version of the ACTRAC Products Ltd flexible, generic assessor training program for the office/clerical area (ANTA 1996).

Martin (1993) proposes a three-tiered system where qualified mentors train supervisors in workplace assessor skills and also train learners in self-assessment skills.

Selecting assessor trainees

Assessor training is seen to be of value to every person in the workforce. It is seen to be of value to trainers ('trainers are assessors and therefore need to be competent in the competency standards for assessors', Gibb 1993, p. 57; see also Jones 1992; Davis 1993; Thomson & Pearce 1993), learners (Martin 1993), supervisors (Jones 1992; Casey 1993; Davis 1993; Martin 1993; Thomson & Pearce 1993), managers (Jones 1992; Casey 1993; Davis 1993; Spicer 1992; Martin 1993; Ballenden 1993), union representatives (Davis 1993) and external assessors including TAFE staff (Jones 1992).

Davis (1993), reporting on a number of case studies into RPL/CBT, describes how the selection of assessors was the subject of negotiation between the industrial parties. Brinkworth (1996) reports that assessors in the telecommunications industry are selected from those who are 'deemed to be competent in the areas in which the assessment will take place' by their employer.

In some areas of industry, personnel are selected for assessor training because of their rank or status. In the RAN, assessor training is offered to all personnel of leading rank and above (Reeves & Benton 1997). Newton (1992) indicates that workplace assessors are selected if they have a sound understanding of CBT, are committed to its success, hold a position of authority/responsibility, are prepared to commit private time, and are expert in their field.

Requirements such as these may have an impact on the catchment of assessor training courses. Bloch, Clayton and Favero (1995) report a 'marked gender imbalance of those attending assessor training' [mainly males] and 'the apparent lack of assessor trainees from non-English-speaking backgrounds'. They call for research on assessor training take-up rates.

The general expectation is that assessors will be endorsed by, registered with, or employed by a registered training provider (Toohey et al. 1995) and will therefore be working with guidelines and a supporting infrastructure.

What is the value of assessor training ?

How certificated assessors use their skills

Reeves and Benton (1997) in their study of assessor training in the Navy found that only 42 per cent of assessor training graduates used their training, although 59 per cent regarded the training as useful. The discrepancy reflects the fact that many respondents found the training useful for duties other than formal assessment. Reasons for not using the assessor training included:

- no subordinates to assess
- other personnel did the assessments
- not a subject matter expert
- not authorised to assess by the Head of Department
- did not want to assess

Cseti and Nissen (1996 p. 2) suggest a similar situation exists across other industry areas. 'A great number of workplace operators, supervisors, team and unionists have been trained as assessors but do not have a context within which to practice their skills'. However, like the Navy study, they recognise that the assessor standards and assessor training can be used more broadly to support the conduct of training needs analysis, the recognition of prior learning, the diagnosis of performance for classification purposes, the awarding of a qualification, the establishment of a performance development/appraisal system and/or the integration of training and other human resource management functions.

Other writers indicate other uses. Bloch (1996) sees assessor training as a vehicle to integrate on and off-the-job learning, and Newton (1992) describes how the skills of trained assessors have been enshrined in a job description for workplace assessors at the Hilton Hotel Group.

These are grand hopes. In stark contrast, Thomson (1994) feels that the short assessor training courses could really only impart 'survival skills'.

Costs and benefits of assessor training

Bloch (1993) describes the difficulties of determining costs and benefits in the training and assessment area. Bloch cites a study (not referenced) that lists the 'training of assessors to interpret standards' as the third most important component in enhancing quality (after 'specifying standards clearly' and 'ensuring that the assessment process is valid'). Bloch indicates that in order to minimise the costs of assessment from assessor training, greater use should be made of existing assessors. In the examples given by Bloch, these are TAFE lecturers, many of whom would not have been trained in assessment at all! (Bailey 1993).

No research identifying benefits was located, and research on costs focussed on monetary cost. The only hard figures to be found are in a paper by Newton (1992) who cites costs of the assessor training course for the Hilton Hotel Group as $535–$635 *per participant* for a two-day course (including participant's manual), or $105 if an in-house trainer is used. These costs are high, given that there are uncertain returns. In view of this, Reeves and Benton (1997) recommend that the numbers of trained assessors be managed to ensure that only those who need training are trained (taking into account such factors as assessment workload and leave periods).

Implications for policy and practice

THE REVIEW OF the literature suggests a number of imlications for policy-makers and practitioners.

- *Sponsor further research.* A concerted research effort is urgently required to extend our understanding of competency-based assessment, how this approach can be taught to assessors and how the impact of assessment can be evaluated. Suggestions are made about specific research topics in the next section.
- *Include interpersonal skills (communication skills, cultural awareness and gender awareness) in assessor standards.* These skills are currently regarded as desirable pre-requisites for assessor training, but clearly there is a need to examine these qualities within the context of the assessment process and attend to them in assessor training.
- *Tighten up on accreditation procedures to ensure that all the assessor competencies are covered, that assessor trainers are qualified and experienced, and that the assessment process is rigorous and includes on-the-job components.* It is startling to observe that assessor courses are accredited that do not meet the assessment standards that they set within their own curriculum.

- *Provide for on-going auditing of assessor training courses to ensure that they conform to their accreditation conditions.* There is an urgent need to ensure that assessor training courses are delivered to the standard set through the accreditation process, and that the performance of assessors trained through these courses is monitored.
- *Promote the specialist units more aggressively.* The assessment standard unit and the extension unit assume that the assessor is working within a well-defined and well-managed assessment system. Such a system would include model assessment tools and guidelines for assessors to follow. Without such infrastructure, assessors trained to the basic units will not be able to assess with the precision expected. It is worth noting that the

training package concept currently being developed by ANTA will substantially support this development.

- *Ensure that all assessors (including TAFE lecturers) are qualified assessors.* The assessor standards do not only relate to the workplace. It can be argued that assessment in the artificial world of the training campus is more difficult than the workplace, yet we still find that lecturers are given little or no assessor training.
- *Establish a national register of assessors (or comprehensive industry-based registers of assessors).* The responsibility of an assessor is awesome. The dangers of incompetent assessment go far beyond the classroom and can impact on a person's whole life and can harm their future clients or employers. A register of assessors which imposes rigorous entry criteria and continuing professional development would be in the interest of those being assessed, their trainers, those issuing their certificates, their employers and the community.

Directions for further research

THE REVIEW ALSO revealed a number of areas requiring further research investigation.

- *The range and characteristics of assessor training courses (accredited and others) currently on offer.* (See also list provided by Alexander [1997]) Assessor training courses have proliferated, with little monitoring of their scope and quality. There are few opportunities to learn from best practice, or from the mistakes of others.
- *The impact of assessor training on assessment behaviours and quality of judgement.* It is an article of faith that assessor training will improve the assessment process, but this faith might not be justified. This research would need to compare the efficacy of judgements made by trained assessors from different assessor training courses in terms of validity, reliability, fairness and equity.
- *The impact of assessor training on the person being assessed in terms of learning, motivation and feedback.* Assessment is an intimate process that can have profound impact on the learner. It can impact on learning styles, self-concept, motivation, self-assessment skills and career plans. Research is needed to explore the impact of assessor training in this area.

- *The impact of assessor training on the productivity of enterprises.* The costs associated with assessment are often rationalised by arguing that the accurate knowledge of competency resources will ultimately result in increased enterprise productivity. The conditions required for that expectation to be realised need to be explored.
- *Research assessment approaches such as professional judgement and holistic assessment to measure their validity and reliability, and to identify ways of encouraging integrated competency-based assessment.* Professional judgement and holistic assessment are based on internalised standards and are therefore difficult to elaborate and even more difficult to teach. Integrated assessment recognises the need to see competencies working together in context (rather than in isolation, fragmented and atomistic),

so that both the underlying elements are observed *and* their integrated application within real tasks. This research should explore ways to achieve not only the naturalness of professional judgement and holistic assessment but the precision of competency-based assessment, and ways to develop those skills through assessor training.

References

Alexander, R 1997, 'Assessment training past, present and future' paper presented at the *Competency-based training and assessment conference*, February, IIR, Sydney.

Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) 1996, *Assessment discussion paper*, Standards and Curriculum Council, ANTA, Melbourne.

Bailey, M 1993, 'Judgement, evidence and the assessment of competency' paper presented at the *Testing times* national conference, Sydney.

Ballenden, C 1992, 'Assessment of clerical competencies', paper presented at the *Competency-based assessment conference*, June, IIR, Sydney.

Ballenden, C 1993, 'Designing an assessment system for the clerical-administrative workforce', in *Testing times*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp. 1–7.

Bartlett, K 1997, 'Assessment—How to make it flexible and innovative', paper presented at the *Competency-based training and assessment conference*, February, IIR, Sydney.

Bloch, B 1993, 'Costing testing', in *Testing times*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp. 8–16.

Bloch, B 1996, 'Integrated assessment—A panacea for all?', paper presented at the *Integrating assessment: Removing the on-the-job/off-the-job gap*, NCVER, Perth.

Bloch, B, Clayton, B & Favero, J 1995, 'Who assesses', in *Key aspects of competency-based assessment*, ed. W C Hall, NCVER, Adelaide.

Brinkworth, B 1996, 'Telecommunications industry: Moving towards a CBT and assessment solution', paper presented at the *Integrating assessment: Removing the on-the-job/off-the-job gap conference*, NCVER, Perth.

Casey, D 1993, 'Competency-based training in the workplace-assessment issues', paper presented at the *National assessment research forum*, VEETAC, Sydney.

Cseti, D & Nissen, D 1996, 'Using the competency standards for assessment', paper presented at the *Integrating assessment: Removing the on-the-job/off-the-job gap conference*, NCVER, Perth.

Davis, S 1993, 'Workplace assessment issues and processes', paper presented at the *National assessment research forum*, VEETAC, Sydney.

Docking, R A 1990, 'Assessment in the workplace: Facts and fallacies', in *Assessment and standards in vocational education and training*, TAFE (NCVER), Adelaide.

Docking, R A 1992, 'Methodologies for workplace assessment' paper presented at the *Competency-based assessment conference*, June, IIR, Sydney.

Dyson, C 1996, 'The frontline management assessment strategy—Challenges and opportunities' paper presented at the *Integrating assessment: Removing the on-the-job/off-the-job gap conference*, NCVER, Perth.

Fripp, C 1996, 'Workplace assessment' paper, presented at the *Integrating assessment: Removing the on-the-job/off-the-job gap conference*, NCVER, Perth.

Gibb, J 1991, *The development of draft competency standards for workplace trainers*, TAFE National Centre for Research and Development, Adelaide.

Gibb, J 1993, 'Trainers/assessors and learners: The human face to the new CBVET system', in *Testing times*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp. 57–65.

Hancock, K 1993, 'Transition assessment in the building and construction industry', paper presented at the *National assessment research forum*, VEETAC, Sydney.

Hummel, K 1995, *Recognition process: Evaluation of assessor judgement*, Assessment Centre for Vocational Education, Sydney.
Jones, B 1992, 'What should be the assessors' profile? Developing standards for assessors', paper presented at the *Competency-based assessment conference*, June, IIR, Sydney.
Jones, B 1993a, 'Assessor standards—what do they mean?', in *Testing times*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp. 135–141.
Jones, B 1993b, 'Developing national standards for workplace trainers and assessors', paper presented at the *Training reform update conference*, IIR, Sydney.
Martin, P 1993, 'Assessment and assurance: A model for delivery CBT systems', in *Testing times*, NCVER, Adelaide, pp. 151–170.
Millan, M 1996, 'Implementation of vocational education in NSW secondary schools', paper presented at the *Integrating assessment: Removing the on-the-job/ off-the-job gap conference*, NCVER, Perth.
Misko, J & Saunders, J 1995, 'Needs of special workers', in *Key aspects of competency-based assessment*, ed. W C Hall, NCVER, Adelaide.
National Forest Industries Training Council 1993, *Assessment framework*, NFITC.
Newton, A 1992, 'How Hilton International Hotel Group select and train on-the-job assessors', paper presented at the *Improving performance results through competency-based assessment conference*, November , IIR, Sydney
Ormond, H 1992, 'Implementing an assessment process at Rural Water Commission of Victoria', paper presented at the *Competency-based assessment conference*, June, IIR, Sydney.
Percival, E 1992, 'Assessing competencies for entry into nursing practice', paper presented at the *Competency-based assessment conference*, June, IIR, Sydney.
Reeves, S & Benton, P 1997, 'Workplace assessment in a well established CBTA system—A Navy perspective', paper presented at the *Competency-based training and assessment conference*, February, IIR, Sydney.
Rumsey, D 1993, 'Practical issues in workplace assessment' paper presented at the *National assessment research forum*, VEETAC, Sydney.
Rumsey, D 1994, *Assessment practical guide*, AGPS, Canberra.
Smith, L 1993, 'Some thoughts about holistic assessment', paper presented at the *National assessment research forum*, VEETAC, Sydney.
Spicer, I O 1992, 'The role of industry in competency assessment', paper presented at the *Competency-based assessment conference*, June, IIR, Sydney.
Thomson, P 1994, 'Current research issues in competency-based assessment', paper presented at the *National TAFE senior executives' conference*, NCVER, Adelaide.
Thomson, P & Pearce, P 1993, *Testing times: A study of assessment on and off the job*, NCVER, Adelaide.
Toohey, S Ryan, G, McLean, J & Hughes, C 1995, 'Assessing competency-based education and training: A literature review', in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 86–117.
Travers, B 1995, 'Still counting for nothing?' in *Key aspects of competency-based assessment*, ed. W C Hall, NCVER, Adelaide.
van Berkel, C 1996, 'Assessment', paper presented at the *Integrating assessment: Removing the on-the-job/off-the-job gap*, NCVER, Perth.
Worsnop, P J 1993, 'Recognition of prior learning in Australia', paper presented at the *Training reform update conference*, IIR, Sydney.

This review of research on vocational education and training is one of a series of reports commissioned to guide the development of future national research and evaluation priorities.

Dr Russell Docking has reviewed assessor training in his long involvement with competency-based assessment methods and systems. He draws conclusions relevant to vocational education and training policy and identifies areas for further investigation.